

FEMA denies aid to residents in fire-ravaged counties

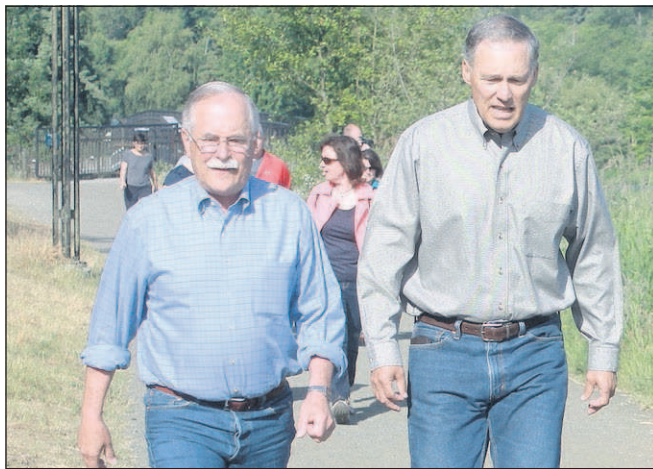
Agency OKs funds to rebuild public facilities

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Federal Emergency Management Agency will help rebuild public facilities damaged by wildfires in Washington state last summer, but won't assist individuals who sustained uninsured losses, disappointing state officials and rural residents reeling from back-to-back record-breaking fire seasons.

More than 1 million acres burned in Washington after June 1. The fires caused an estimated \$42.49 million in damage to roads, bridges, parks and other public property. FEMA has agreed to help repair public damage in eight counties and the Colville Reservation in northeastern Washington.

FEMA, however, rejected a separate request from Gov. Jay Inslee to provide aid to individuals in Okanogan, Stevens and Chelan counties, the hard-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, right, and Public Lands Commissioner Peter Goldmark, shown here walking in June in Olympia in a test of their fitness to visit wildfire scenes, say they are disappointed that the Federal Emergency Management Agency has declined to provide assistance to people who suffered uninsured losses in wildfires this season. Inslee has appointed Goldmark to lead a council on recovering from and preparing for major wildfires.

est-hit areas. "This is very disappointing news. This is the second time in as many years that we've been denied individual assistance following a major fire," Inslee said in a written statement. "We have homeowners that have lost everything."

Most of the damage oc-

curred in Okanogan County, one of the top agriculture-producing counties in the state. The 522,229-acre Okanogan Complex fire burned one year after the 256,000-acre Carlton Complex blazed through the county. Some 3,850 cattle were lost in this year's fire, according

to a preliminary estimate.

Being bypassed again by FEMA is painful, said Jon Wyss, chairman of the Carlton Complex Long Term Recovery Group and president of the Okanogan County Farm Bureau.

The recovery group issued a statement saying its pleas for FEMA aid fell on deaf ears. "It would have made a world of difference," Wyss said of the aid.

FEMA notified the governor of its decision in an Oct. 22 letter. The agency said the damage suffered by individuals wasn't severe enough to warrant assistance.

FEMA spokeswoman Cam Rossie said the agency toured fire-damaged areas to assess property losses, disruptions to daily lives and the availability of volunteers in determining whether it needed to provide assistance.

"We're not always the best option for recovery," she said.

The fires destroyed 146 homes and damaged 476. Nearly two-thirds of the homes were uninsured or underinsured, according to the

governor's office.

Agriculture is the main economic driver in the hardest-hit counties, according to a state report submitted to FEMA.

"As a native of Okanogan County, it is hard to overstate the heartbreak and the suffering the people of northeast Washington have gone through the past two fires," Public Lands Commissioner Peter Goldmark said in a written statement. "By refusing to help, FEMA is letting down communities that are in desperate need of assistance."

Inslee said FEMA should re-evaluate how it determines eligibility for individual disaster assistance.

"I will continue to fight for greater federal support for disaster recovery particularly as our state encounters hotter, drier and increasingly devastating fire seasons," he said.

If FEMA had granted the state's request, individuals would have been eligible to apply for displaced worker benefits, low-interest loans and money for temporary housing and to replace lost property.

The Western Governors'

Association last year adopted a resolution calling on FEMA to provide more help for individuals after disasters. Washington officials said Friday that it's unclear to them how FEMA evaluates requests for assistance.

Inslee also announced Friday that he will form a wildland fire council to coordinate recovery and prepare for future fires. Goldmark will lead the council.

FEMA approved federal aid to repair public property in Chelan, Ferry, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Whatcom and Yakima counties, as well as the Colville reservation.

Nonprofit organizations that provide public services, such as hospitals, schools and homeless shelters, also will be eligible to apply for money.

FEMA will fund up to 75 percent of the cost of repairs.

Assistance was not approved for Asotin, Columbia, Douglas, Garfield, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, the Spokane Tribe of Indians, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.

Idaho students continue FFA bus trip tradition

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

For the Mackay Junior-Senior High School students who make an annual bus trip to the national FFA convention, the journey is as memorable as the event itself.

On Oct. 22, 21 of the Custer County, Idaho, school's 35 students loaded into an Eagle commuter bus with nearly a million miles on the odometer for a 12-day trip, highlighted by the national FFA convention in Louisville, Ky., and stops in Colorado, Texas, Louisiana and Tennessee.

It marked Mackay's 29th consecutive bus trip to FFA's crowning event. As usual, Mackay students offered seats to FFA members from other chapters, picking up 18 students from Challis, Aberdeen and Shelley.

Normally, Mackay students are charged \$600. Many opt to work off part of the total in a school-run scrap metal recycling operation, which helped the FFA chapter raise money to buy its bus several years ago.

This year, however, the cost was just \$100, thanks to Mackay senior Hailey Hampton. She won \$10,000 toward the trip through an agricultural-themed essay contest sponsored by Culver's restaurants.

"I talked about how we need to have empathy for the American farmer," said Hampton, who addressed the abundance of misinformation about agriculture and the importance of setting the



John O'Connell/Capital Press

A Mackay Junior-Senior High School bus taking students to the FFA national convention in Kentucky stops to pick up Aberdeen and Shelley students at the Blackfoot Walmart on Oct. 22. Mackay senior Hailey Hampton, who is standing, won her FFA chapter \$10,000, covering the cost of the trip for her classmates, with an essay she wrote about agriculture.

record straight.

Hampton was recently surprised to find her entire family in attendance at a school assembly — and to learn it was in her honor, so Culver's could properly announce her achievement. Culver's offered an extra \$4,000 to fix the bus's air conditioning when the school's agricultural teacher, Trent Van Leuven, expressed concern about driving through the Texas heat.

Jessie Coming, a senior marketing manager with the Wisconsin-based chain, said there were 450 contest entries.

"It was an amazing thing to discover such an awesome essay had come from this. It's a very unique story and something we just stumbled upon," Coming said.

During 80 hours of driving,

the students will stop for the Louisiana State Fair, the Grand Ole Opry, dinner and a Jake Owen concert on Culver's, a Denver hockey game, two national parks and the site of the Kennedy assassination.

About 150 Wichita Falls, Texas, FFA students have organized a joint social and barbecue for the Mackay group. The students have also scheduled agricultural tours, including the Randal County Feed Yard in Amarillo, Texas, the last Mississippi farm with a working cotton gin, a catfish farm, a horse rehabilitation hospital near Lexington, Ky., and a tour of the University of Missouri's agricultural programs.

As usual, Van Leuven said they've packed 300 pounds of fresh potatoes, to offer their tour

hosts. Many students who have never left the West will experience 15 states.

"I love that we take the bus," Hampton said. "Other chapters that fly probably have more sleep than us, but we get to see so many incredible things."

Van Leuven has his fingers crossed that the bus won't experience mechanical trouble — a fairly common occurrence in past years. But, he said, changing the tradition is not an option.

"This is kind of a rite of passage. The school board members, nearly all of them have been on the trip or driven the bus coming back," Van Leuven said. "If I said, 'Hey, we're not going to take the bus to the national convention this year,' I'd probably get quartered."

WDFW sends report on wolf shooting to prosecutor

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington state wildlife officers investigating the shooting of OR-14, a gray wolf collared in Oregon more than three years ago, have submitted their report to the Columbia County, Wash., prosecutor.

A Blue Mountains cabin owner reported Oct. 11 that he shot the wolf because he believed it was threatening his dogs, his wife and himself, according to a Department of Fish and Wildlife report.

A WDFW sergeant has discussed the case with prosecutors. The department hasn't said whether it will recommend the shooter be charged with taking a state endangered species, a gross misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

"We want to give the prosecutor a chance to look at the report. Obviously, they're going to have to make the final decision anyway," WDFW Capt. Dan Rahn said Monday.

The prosecutor's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Last year, WDFW recommended charges be filed against a Whitman County man who pursued and shot a wolf in a field. The shooter was charged, but Whitman County Prosecutor Denis Tracy dropped the case when the defendant agreed to pay \$100 in court costs.

In the Columbia County case, according to the WDFW investigation, the shooter was standing on his porch when he fired a .22-caliber rifle 10 times at OR-14. A shot through the skull was likely instantly fa-



Courtesy of Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

tal and dropped the animal 43 yards from the cabin, according to WDFW. The cabin owner told investigators that his wife saw the wolf while she was calling their two dogs into the cabin.

The man said the wolf looked at him and seemed to be coming his way. He said he was carrying a rifle as a matter of routine because of predators such as bears, coyotes and wolves. He said he fired until the rifle was empty.

WDFW Sgt. Paul Mosman interviewed the couple that evening.

"It became apparent through talking to them that the entire family's sense of security at their cabin had been shattered by the appearance of a wolf on their property," the sergeant wrote in his report. OR-14 was known to cross Interstate 84 into Washington and had drawn the attention of wildlife managers in both states over the years.

For now, Portland, neighboring cities won't expand into farmland

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Portland and neighboring cities won't expand their urban growth boundaries any time soon, temporarily easing the development pressure on farmland in the tri-county metro area.

Neither the population growth forecast nor the job growth forecast supports adding new land for development, said Martha Bennett, chief operating officer of Metro, the regional land-use planning agency. Metro's elected council will most likely adopt Bennett's recommendation in November.

Metro coordinates land-use planning in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties, which include the cities of Portland, Hillsboro, Beaverton and Gresham and 1.5 million people.

But the counties, Washington and Clackamas in particular, also are strong agricultural production areas. Farmers grow nursery crops, Christmas trees, seed crops, vegetables, fruit and berries within short drives of city limits, which makes for contentious land-use decisions.

Oregon's land-use planning system was intended to protect farmland from city

sprawl. Cities are required to establish urban growth boundaries, and expanding beyond them requires a public process often accompanied by conflict.

Metro, which has an elected council, attempted to ease the repeated short-term arguments by establishing urban and rural reserves, designating which land will be developed and which land will remain farm or forest for the next 50 years.

Legal challenges have

prevented full implementation of the reserves plan, however.

In the meantime, Clackamas County commissioners are pressing to redesignate some land south of Wilsonville from rural to urban reserves. They're opposed by farm groups such as Friends of French Prairie.

Given the uncertainty and reduced population and job growth expectations, Bennett recommended Metro hold off on urban growth expansion.

She said the council should revisit the question in 2017-18.

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